

2-2012

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Lily Kong

Singapore Management University, [lilykong@smu.edu.sg](mailto:lilykong@smu.edu.sg)

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## Citation

Kong, Lily.(2012). Conceptualising Cultural and Creative Spaces. *Bunkakeizaigaku [Cultural Economics]*, 9(1), 12-22.

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# Conceptualising Cultural and Creative Spaces

Lily Kong  
Department of Geography  
National University of Singapore  
[lilykong@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lilykong@nus.edu.sg)

Paper submitted to  
*Bunka Keizaigaku (Cultural Economics)*  
(Journal of the Japan Association for Cultural Economics)<sup>1</sup>  
February 2012

## Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on cultural and creative spaces, and examines its merits and shortcomings in helping to explain how culture and creativity in the city are supported. Alternative ways of conceptualising cultural and creative spaces which emphasise the importance of networks and multi-scalar relationships and non-economic considerations will be examined.

## Introduction

This paper is based on a keynote address to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary symposium of JACE in Tokyo in November 2011, in which I responded to a specific request by the organizers of the conference to speak about the theoretical literature on cultural policy and urban development. In thinking about urban development for cultural activities, and the role of policy in such urban development, I begin by drawing attention to various types of urban spaces for arts and cultural activities. There are state-vaunted cultural monuments (such as the Shanghai Grand Theatre and Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao), officially-formulated or organically evolved arts clusters (such as Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter and New York's SoHo respectively), ordinary everyday spaces in which there are temporary eruptions of artistic performance (such as spaces used by buskers), and "underground" spaces where alternative arts find space for expression (such as in clubs). As Kong (2012) observes, some of these spaces may be newly constructed urban sites designed to stimulate cultural creativity (Flew 2005:4), for which examples abound (such as Singapore's Esplanade – Theatres by the Bay, and Hong Kong's long-debated West Kowloon Cultural District). Other spaces are derived from existing facilities, both ordinary spaces of everyday lives and more spectacular heritage sites of distinction, revitalized and re-used in ways different from their original purpose (Kong, 2011:452). One interesting example is Amsterdam's Westergasfabriek (WGF) located in a former gas works factory area, where the giant gas holder has since been used to

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<sup>1</sup> *Post-print version*

Published as:

Kong, L., (2012), "Conceptualising Cultural and Creative Spaces," *Bunkakeizaigaku (Cultural Economics)*, vol.9, no.1, 12-22.

host events like operas and parties, and the general site redeveloped into exhibition and performance space (Hitters and Richards 2002: 239).

In this paper, I have chosen to focus on cultural and creative clusters specifically. The paper will be divided into five main sections after this. The first will discuss the ways in which different authors have conceptualized clusters (not necessarily cultural or creative). The second will focus on a critique of the existing literature. The third elaborates on the ways in which some of this conceptualization has been brought to bear on *cultural* and *creative* clusters in particular. The fourth brings together alternative and/or complementary ideas that have been propounded which may help our understanding of the milieu that support creative activities. Finally, I summarise the merits and drawbacks of cluster analysis and call for more robust and grounded empirical work on cultural and creative clusters specifically in order to build stronger theories and make better policies.

## **Industrial districts and clusters**

The idea of co-location of specialized industries, or what is fashionably termed “clusters” in academic and policy circles today, is not new and has been around since 1890, with the writings of Alfred Marshall who noted the “concentration of specialised industries in particular localities” (Martin and Sunley, 2003). Since then and in more recent years especially, a number of authors have attempted to develop conceptualizations of such concentrations.

Perhaps the most popular of the cluster proponents (particularly among policy makers) is Michael Porter. His notion of industrial or business ‘clusters’ has been well used by many policy makers for promoting national, regional and local competitiveness, innovation and growth. To Porter (2000:32), clusters are:

... concentrations of highly specialized skills and knowledge, institutions, rivals, related businesses and sophisticated customers in a particular nation or region. Proximity in geographic, cultural and institutional terms allows special access, special relationships, better information, powerful incentives, and other advantages in productivity and productivity growth that are difficult to tap from a distance. As a result, in a cluster, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Porter (1998, 2000) believes that clusters offer competitive advantages in three ways. They increase the productivity of companies, drive the direction and pace of innovation, and stimulate the formation of new businesses which, in turn, expand and strengthen the clusters themselves. For Porter, innovative capacity is the key to productivity, and clustering delivers higher rates of innovation because it allows rapid perception of new buyer needs; concentrates knowledge and information; facilitates ongoing relationships with other institutions including universities; allows rapid assimilation of new technological possibilities; and provides richer insights into new management practices (Simmie, 2004:1096).

For Porter, the geographic scope of clusters can range from a region, state or city to span nearby countries (e.g. the chemical cluster in southern Germany extends

to German-speaking Switzerland). This is determined by the distance over which informational, transactional, incentive and other efficiencies occur (Porter, 2000:16). Clusters may also encompass an array of linked industries and other entities important to competition, such as suppliers of specialized inputs such as components, machinery and services as well as providers of specialized infrastructure. They extend downstream to customers and laterally to manufacturers and companies related by skills, technology and common inputs. Many clusters include government agencies, universities, think tanks and trade associations (Porter, 2000:16) (See mapping of the California wine cluster and the Italian leather fashion cluster in Porter, 1998:79&80; Porter, 2000:17)

While widely cited, Porter is by no means the only proponent of cluster theory. Others before and after him have tried to bring some conceptual clarity to the wide array of empirical observations about cluster existence. I cite a few examples here. Using the language of “industrial districts”, Markusen (1996) drew up the following typology based on the **relative size and decision-making role of firms within the industrial district**.

- a) Marshallian industrial district – where clusters of small firms making investment and production decisions locally transform inputs into a unique and competitive output
- b) Hub and spoke industrial district – which is characterised by one or two large firms which act as a hub for a cluster of smaller firms in one or a few industries
- c) Satellite platform – made up of branch offices of multinational corporations with little local decision making
- d) State-anchored district – a more eclectic category, where a major government tenant anchors the regional economy.

Markusen acknowledges that “[a] real-world district may be an amalgam of one or more types, and over time districts may mutate from one type to another” (Markusen, 1996:296).

Writing about “industrial clusters”, Gordon and McCann (2000) identify three types of local firm concentrations, which place emphasis on the **extent and strength of interactions among firms**. These are pure agglomeration, the industrial complex and social networks. The pure model of agglomeration is one that ‘presumes no form of cooperation between actors beyond what is in their individual interests in an atomised and competitive environment’ (Gordon and McCann, 2000:517). Hence, industrial concentration may be the result of ‘entirely unconnected individual-firm decisions where those firms reach similar decisions without any necessary interactions or linkages between them’ (Simmie, 2004:1098). The second model, the industrial complex, is essentially static and predictable in nature and refers to firms who co-locate in particular areas to minimise ‘their observable spatial transactions costs’ (ie. transport costs) (Gordon and McCann, 2000:519). They are primarily concerned with cost saving in relation to production links and an example of this model would be the oil-refining, chemicals and pharmaceuticals complexes, or automotive engineering eg. Toyota City (ibid). A third type of economic concentration is based on social networks. Because of the trust relationships that are said to exist, firms are prepared to undertake risky ventures and reorganise their relations in support of mutual goals. Although there is nothing explicitly spatial about this, these

social network relationships are said to be easier to maintain when participants are located within reasonable proximity to one another (Gordon and McCann, 2000; Simmie, 2004:1098).

In recent years, growing attention has been paid to transaction cost advantages and increasing returns to scale that arise from clustering, as well as less measurable benefits such as the building up of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995), tacit knowledge and informal networks, and the “cafeteria effect” (Konstadakopulos, 2000). This adds to the explosion of literature that acknowledges how inter-firm learning is facilitated with concentrations of firms, institutions, and labour; and how interactions between different agencies, including government agencies are enhanced; and how understanding of client needs are sharpened (see, for example, Grabher, 1993; Amin and Thrift, 1994; Scott, 1996, 2001; Storper, 1997, Scheff, 2001; Cooke, 2002). It is possible to cite many other efforts over many years to bring conceptual clarity to the question of how geographical propinquity stimulates economic productivity, but it is also important to focus attention on the problems with cluster theory.

### **Critiques of cluster theory**

In as much as Porter’s ideas have been much lauded, they have been quite severely criticized as well. First, Simmie (2004:1098) points out that despite the significant contributions of economic geographers through the years to understand and explain the importance of localized specialized areas to economic growth, Porter nonetheless tends to slide over the distinctions between different reasons for firms to group together.

Second, it is not clear how agglomeration is related to regional and local economic growth. In particular, Martin and Sunley (2003:28) argue that the application of the cluster concept has been so wide that its “explanation of causality and determination becomes overly stretched, thin and fractured”. In particular, they argue that the empirical case for clustering remains unclear, cautioning that just because there is “an association between some high-growth industries and various forms of geographical concentration does not mean that this concentration is the main cause of their economic growth or relative success” (Martin and Sunley, 2003:29). They further caution that against making the mistake of “jumping from particular associations to general causality and applicability” (Martin and Sunley, 2003:29).

Third, a key criticism that has been leveled at Porter’s cluster concept is its elasticity when it comes to geographical scale. To Porter, clusters can extend anywhere from “large and small economies in rural and urban areas, and at several geographic levels (for examples, nations, states metropolitan regions, and cities)” (Porter, 1998:204), or even to “a network of neighbouring countries” (Porter, 1998:199). Yet, a major prerequisite of accurate analysis is the ability to “define the geographical scale of a cluster in order to identify how local is the competition that drives them and what contributions linkages and networks make to competitiveness, productivity and innovation” (Simmie, 2004:1099).

Operationally, this ambiguity makes it difficult to focus policy and measure economic value (Evans *et al.*, 2005). Yet, Simmie (2004:1099) argues that it is this ambiguity that accounts for the “enormous popularity of the concept in policy circles” as it can “mean all things to all policy-makers”.

## **Cultural and creative clusters**

I turn now specifically to cultural and creative clusters. I use the terms interchangeably here; they are related, yet not the same. Studies stemming from Europe (with the exception of UK) commonly use the term ‘cultural clusters’ while those from US and Australia appear to favour the term ‘creative clusters’. Often, this is a reflection of the lack of conceptual clarity around the ideas of “cultural industries” and “creative industries” themselves. It is not my intention in this paper to work through these differences, except to say that they are not inconsequential. The nature of clustering does differ depending on the specific activities under consideration, and cultural clusters focused on performing and visual arts, for example, have quite different dynamics at work from television and film work, from fashion design clusters. But, for now, at a fairly broad level of generalization in a short paper, I am unable to do more than adopt the terms as used in the literature.

A cultural/creative cluster is often taken to refer to “a linked grouping of creative industries, firms or cultural activities which has a spatial concentration and significant growth potential” (Evans *et al.*, 2005:26). As creative clusters are often seen as a subset of business clusters, they are subjected to the same economic analysis and policy response as other industries. This is dangerous as many creative clusters are “de facto cultural quarters with assorted cultural consumption and not for profit activities”, thus meriting evaluation through a different lens. Evans *et al.* (2005:26) observe that different methodologies are required to capture the cluster based interactions and interdependencies given the unusual organisation of creative and cultural businesses as compared to other business segments. Be that as it may, much of the literature on creative clusters recites a similar formula for success, as evinced by Wu (2005) who cites cities like San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, Austin, Washington DC, Dublin and Bangalore as being successful and at the same time characterized by the presence of outstanding university research and commercial linkages, availability of venture capital, presence of anchor firms and mediating organizations, availability of appropriate base of knowledge and skill as well as quality of services and infrastructure, targeted public policies, and diversity and quality of place. Despite a caveat that the importance of university-based innovation and entrepreneurship should not be overstated, Wu (2005:24) nevertheless also notes that creative industries often prosper in response to the distinctive knowledge base and characteristics of each community. In addition, Wu notes that the successful development of creative clusters, especially those involving high technology, is usually an indigenous process, building on the distinctive knowledge and industrial base of a city. Relatedly, Scott (2006:10) adds that the importance of location is because “[t]he particular traditions, conventions and skills that exist in any given urban area help to infuse local products with an exclusive aura that can be imitated by firms in other places but never completely reproduced”. Further, the importance of ‘tacit knowledge’ must be recognized. O’Connor (2004) argues that creative clusters often involve the idea of tacit as opposed to formal, codified knowledge. As tacit knowledge is embedded locally, cultural producers thus need to

be 'inside' the circuit of knowledge. Clustering is hence essential as innovation has to do with the transformation of signs – 'a style, a look, a sound' by local culture – and the city consequently acts as a crucible where 'innovative consumption meets ear to the ground production' (O'Connor, 2004:134). Thus, rather than being an industry along 'Fordist' lines, the cultural sector relies on a scattered and fluid network of creative producers. It is precisely at this small-scale, local, heterogeneous nature that "the creative work gets done, and it is here that insiders' knowledge and immersion in the local scene produce the vital innovations and mutations" (O'Connor, 2004:136). Overall, the effect of linkages between firms, the existence of structures that encourage learning and innovation, as well as an external environment for innovation and individual expressions of creativity (Scott, 2006:6) constitute a "creative milieu" (Hall, 2000) or "creative field" (Scott, 1999; 2006).

Given all the above, it is apparent from the literature of cultural/creative clusters that there is a privileging of cities in analysis. According to Wu (2005), creative industries are almost exclusively city-based. They are said to be "privileged locations in the new information-rich economy as nodes of intense business interaction and sharing of ideas and insights, leading to rapid learning and innovation. They are conducive environments offering scope for people and ideas to mix and mingle; places where knowledge is created, tested, adapted and disseminated" (Turok, 2004:1079).

As with other efforts at conceptualization, development of the literature on cultural/creative clusters has come to a point where attempts are made to construct typologies, using a variety of criteria to introduce at least some heuristic orderliness. Bassett *et al.* (2002:165) identified the following categorization principles:

- Stage of development (embryonic, established, mature)
- Employment dynamic (employment growing, declining or stable)
- Depth (the number of industrial and other linkages)
- Significance (whether international, national or regional)
- Levels of linkages, interactions and collective learning ('geographical concentrations', 'specialised areas', 'milieux', 'innovative milieux')

In turn, Evans *et al.* (2005) sought to identify creative clusters at different scales, using the concentration of enterprises, cultural activity, employment/occupation statistics as indicators (Evans *et al.*, 2005:26). Based on a reading of the existing conceptual and empirical literature, Evans *et al.* (2005:30) identified five scales or cluster geographies for the creative sector, namely the transnational, national, regional, city region and neighbourhood scales. Evans *et al.* (2005) also offered another classification, this time, in terms of the levels of development of the creative sector, namely *dependent*, *aspirational*, *emergent* and *mature*.

Another effort to bring conceptual clarity to the phenomenon of cultural/creative clusters may be found in Mommaas' (2004) study of the Netherlands. There, he identifies that clusters differ in terms of "their portfolio of activities, both horizontally and vertically, the way they are financed and managed, their programmatic and spatial position within a wider urban infrastructure and their specific developmental trajectory. They can range from being mostly consumption to

production oriented, from predominantly art to entertainment based from being the result of top-down planning to bottom up organic growth, from relying on closed and hierarchical to open and network based forms of finance and management” (Mommaas, 2004:530). These varieties of form are related in part to the variety of rationales underlying their development, as Flew (2005:5) identifies. Creative clusters could aim at:

- Attracting globally mobile capital and skilled labour to particular locations
- Stimulating a more entrepreneurial and demand oriented approach to arts and cultural policy
- Promoting innovation and creativity between culturally vibrant locales and innovation in other economic sectors
- Finding new uses for derelict industrial era sites in post industrial economies
- Promoting cultural diversity and cultural democratisation

### **Beyond cluster thinking: What alternatives?**

Scholars have tried to explain why creative clusters have gained such popularity as a policy tool. Creative industries tend to be dominated by SMEs and micro businesses, specialised craft or new digital practices, or where work is organised around short term projects and labour flexibility and labour market information are critically important. Hence, clustering is particularly beneficial for them as competitive advantage could be derived by obtaining efficiency gains that a small firm may not manage on its own (Evans et al, 2005:27; Wu, 2005:3). Thus, creative clusters are often employed as a favoured policy tool to promote the creative industries (Flew, 2005).

The import of such recommendations is that the cultural economy is a component of the contemporary economy that the state can target as a priority growth area, through schemes such as centres of innovation and creativity, planning for cultural clusters or districts through mixed land use and/or taxation incentives, and grants for networking between firms. Indeed, urban economies have become increasingly dependent on the production and consumption of culture, so much so that cultural planning and urban planning are closely braided, indeed inseparable, as some argue (see, for example, Worpole and Greenhalgh, 1999; Landry, 2000). Certain precincts are remodeled and reinvented as ‘cultural quarters’, and cultural industry activities are used as promotional material for strategies in marketing cities and attracting mobile investment capital. They underpin place making and city re-imaging strategies, while cultural texts portray specific places in ways that can either enhance or contest popular meanings of those locations (Gibson et al 2002: 174).

However, cultures, cities and plans are not uncontested resources, and are embroiled in an urban and cultural politics of planning. Thus, Freestone and Gibson (2004) have foregrounded several issues, for example, that cultural projects are not consensual strategies but contested terrain (see also Bianchini 1993; Evans and Foord, 2003); that there is no single model for culture-based urban planning; that urban cultural policies may produce ‘ersatz’ and ‘pastiche’ outcomes in the remaking of a city’s cultural identity which may disenfranchise local communities, particularly suburban and deprived populations (see also Zukin, 1995); and that a city planned



for cultural consumption is not a culture capital if it simply functions as an 'entrepot of the arts' (Zukin, 1995:150), buying and selling without producing the arts itself. Further, Zukin (1995) alerts us that urban cultural projects legitimize the separation of rich areas from other parts of the city, which we extend to a reminder that cultural clusters or cultural quarters serve to create markers of social and cultural separation and distinction within the city. Similarly, she questions if cultural strategies of economic redevelopment destroy the conditions for original cultural production by displacing artists and performers through upgrading and increasing property values in planned clusters (see also Kong, 2000). Thus, it remains to be said that cultural clusters in urban planning strategies are oftentimes tied to civic boosterist agendas of urban elites (Boyle, 1997) which deserve critical understanding.

Instead of seeing clustering as an important new guiding principle of the cultural economy, others have argued that the agglomeration of cultural production in major cities merely reinforces the uneven distribution of economic development that have always been characteristic of capitalist modes of production, producing heightened forms of metropolitan primacy (Gibson et al 2002). Cunningham (2001:30) has argued that

the industries which such policy rhetorics and aspirations spawned have undoubtedly obeyed the iron laws of infrastructural agglomeration – Paris or the provinces. Investing in large national flagship institutions and national flagship funding agencies – what we might call Big Culture – generally speaking means further consolidation of cultural industries in one or two spatial hotspots in the country... national cultural policies have, by and large, contributed to further centralisation of cultural resource and cultural cachet, rather than contributing to their redistribution spatially... and the institutions which deliver some of the core popular cultural product and service... have been the worst centralisers: film and television.

Indeed, Zukin (1995: 273) has argued that cultural strategies, including those that promote clusters and innovation spaces, 'are often a worst-case scenario of economic development', representing 'a weapon against the decentralisation of jobs from established industrial concentrations' at precisely the moment that governments seek to shrug off responsibilities for spatial redistribution as a counter-measure to uneven development. The cultural economy 'confirm[s] the city's claim on cultural hegemony... a claim to these cities' status in the global hierarchy' (Zukin 1995:26), at the expense of non-metropolitan areas. Such criticisms demand a quite different policy response than a wholesale adoption of the logic of promoting clusters, instead reminding economic development agencies of the spatial political economy of (cultural) production beyond the localized urban cluster.

The agglomerative tendencies of cultural industries and the importance of the local scale may therefore have been overstated at the expense of understanding the role of global flows, national interventions in the regulation of production, and inter-scalar dimensions of cultural economic activities. Moreover, creativity and innovation are not unique to large cities. Though their critical mass clearly influences the number of firms and size of output from creative sectors in cities, creativity is

everywhere possible (Gibson and Connell 2004), and transformations triggered by the rise of the cultural economy have been as much, if not more profound, in rural and regional areas where the cultural industries previously had little presence at all (Kneafsey 2001; Curry et al 2001; Gibson 2002; Tonts and Grieve 2002). Cultural production and the symbolic economy has always to a certain extent been present in major cities, yet in rural areas in the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries, transformations have been brought about by counterurban 'lifestyle' migration, commodifications of rural landscapes, telecommuting and the rise of arts and cultural industry sectors – all examples of or outcomes related to symbolic production. Here, proximity and clustering may be less of an influence on the particular form of cultural economic practice than the pattern and sheer weight of urban-regional flows of capital, commodities and people. In Broken Hill in remote Australia, a visual arts scene grew because of a combination of spectacular landscapes and cheap housing that artists could afford to rent even with intermittent incomes. In rural Ireland, tourism would have a similar transformative effect, but on music rather than art.

While most research has tended to emphasise the agglomerative tendencies of cultural industries and the ways in which the value of clustering can be harnessed, we suggest that there are other complexities that deserve at least equal attention. There is no doubt that agglomeration theory remains a valid frame for analysis, but the relative neglect of other phenomenon such as cross-national flows, spatial political economy and rural cultural production prompt us to foreground their significance, and urge research where they have been comparatively neglected.

### ***Recognising transnational linkages***

Using the example of film and television industries in Scotland, Turok (2003) argues that national and transnational organisations and government regulation are more important than localised networks in influencing their scale and durability. Similarly, Ward (2004) in her study of Film City Inc - a cluster group that was created by the Brisbane City Council to 'increase the level of creative industries production that is created and owned locally', observes that Film City Inc functioned more as a satellite district dependent on the more successful 'cluster' based in Los Angeles. Ultimately, Ward discovered, the vitality of the local production environment has less to do with the interaction of firms and individuals within a specific location (in this case, Brisbane) and more to do with the establishment of links with external sources of finance and distribution tied to the international system of film production. Likewise, Brown *et al.* (2000:450) in their study of the music industry in Sheffield and Manchester found that 'despite strong local identification and networks, the music industry is the most penetrated by global business structures'. Often it is in international exposure where success is measured and this has little in common with the local identity.

Simmie thus suggests that there are limits to clustering, that "contrary to local clustering hypothesis, market leading innovative firms seem to be more a part of an internationally distributed system of innovation" with clients largely residing within the advanced economies of Europe and US. As such, it is not so much the strength and intensity of the linkages within the cluster that contribute to innovation. Simmie (2003, 2004) argues that innovation is not only produced by 'endogenous capacity', but that

firms which trade beyond the region are more innovative as they deal with 'exogenous clients' who provide the main source of and spur to learning. Innovative regions thus tend to be more global in nature, and incorporate formal learning as central to their operations. The knowledge and information that are the impetus of innovation are "concentrated more within the firms themselves or gathered from non-spatial sources" (Simmie, 2004:1111). Similarly, O'Connor (2004:135) acknowledges the need for greater research into the mix of formal and tacit urban agglomeration and the influence of internationally distributed factors in the cluster debate. Coe's (2000, 2001) arguments in the context of film production in Vancouver offer sound empirical evidence of this, where a local labour pool, localized knowledge (both tacit and codified) and local access to suppliers are important, but not exclusively. Quite as important are extra-local networks for funding and distribution in order that productions can be viable.

Simmie (2004:1111) concludes that proponents of clustering dynamics need to be able to explain the "relative significance of both concentration and international linkages". This is hopefully a clarion call to policy-makers who have been trying to "identify locally confined clusters as the basis of economic growth where in fact few if any traded activities exist at all", to be a little more circumspect in their policy goals (Simmie, 2004:1111).

### ***Decentering the firm***

Just as emphasis should be placed on transnational linkages, equally, it has been pointed out that the business cluster approach is not appropriate as an analytical tool for creative industries as creative industry firms are very much project-based, and often disband after projects. As such, the firm would not be an ideal mode of analysis (Pratt, 2004:6) as advocated by the business cluster approach. Pratt suggests that looking at the Creative Industries Production System (CIPS) would be a better alternative.

Pratt (2004:13) observes that the system is more akin to a web or an ecosystem rather than a chain as it need not necessarily be linear in nature. To him, the creative industries production chain is made up of four key links (Pratt, 2004:12-13):

1. Creation/content origination – refers to the processes by which creative material and intellectual assets are originated and produced.
2. Manufacture - concerns the making of prototypes for reproduction later
3. Distribution and mass production - refers to the activities associated with channelling creative products and services into end-user markets. It relates to the physical processes of reproduction and mass distribution eg. printing, shipping, CD replication, wholesaling
4. Exchange – refers to the exhibition function embodied in venue-based activities like concert halls and cinemas as well as the retailing of creative products.

Pratt (2004:13) believes that the CIPS would enable researchers and policy makers to 'see' the totality of the process, raising awareness of the implications that one step can have on the other stages in the process. It also encourages analysts to explore

where chains are 'interlocked' and the strengths and weaknesses of individual chains.

### ***Beyond economics***

Another way of thinking beyond clusters is to extend beyond what is essentially an economic analysis of clusters. For example, in terms of social dimensions, how do clusters contribute to social inclusion and exclusion, social cohesion and community life? In environmental terms, analyses of clusters need to consider their role in urban rejuvenation. In terms of governance, the question of how cultural activities are to be managed, the level of government intervention, government funding, and civil society influence, for example, deserve to be understood.

### **Conclusions**

The value of clustering as an explanation has been much criticized, so it will do us well to remind ourselves of its explanatory value. Factors that contribute to the tendency to agglomerate are linked to the rapid, ever-changing circulation of information, which ensures that there is a constant tendency to destabilization of prevailing norms and practices, and a certain propensity for new insights and new ways of seeking accumulation. To stay in touch with trends, producers must be 'close to action', in precincts where cultural consumption is concentrated, and where cultural producers can keep a close eye on competitors while simultaneously benefiting from the work of cultural intermediaries who construct markets through the various techniques of persuasion and marketing (Negus, 2002:504). Such agglomeration

... is magnified where divisions of labour in cultural or economic production are strongly in evidence... where many specialized but complementary individuals and organisations come together in constant interchange, thus forming functional as well as spatial clusters of interrelated activities. (Scott 2001:12).

Clustering holds immense policy appeal, in part because "it sits well with the current preoccupation with micro-economic supply-side intervention, and especially with the policy imperatives of raising productivity and innovation" (Martin and Sunley, 2003:8-9). Adopting the business and industrial cluster approach in the context of cultural/creative activities is however problematic for a variety of reasons. The focus on individual firm preferences in the business cluster approach, the negation of the non-economic (spatial and temporal) variables; and the lack of attention to the specificity of particular industries all point to the need for greater care and circumspection in the use of clusters as a primary tool to achieve policy objectives. Flew (2005) also cautions against the danger of adopting a 'cookie-cutter' approach such as applying of creative cluster models in excessive sameness. Citing Oakley (2004:73), Flew (2005:7) noted that in the UK context, creative industries strategies often seem 'hellbent on trying to replicate a single creative industries model characterised by a university, some incubators, and a creative hub, with or without a café, galleries and fancy shops'. As Scott (2006:14) remarks: "There is ... a need to

cultivate a due sense of just how imperfect our understanding of the relevant issues is, and hence our capacity for remedial action". The creative clusters that have been successful are those that have integrated themselves into the international network, whilst grounded in the local mores and production chains.

Given the promises and perils of cluster theory, it is imperative that more detailed and grounded empirical work on cultural and creative clusters – of different kinds – is undertaken. This will obviate the tendency to rely on existing theorizations that are based on non-culture/creativity-related clusters. Neither theory building nor policy formulation benefits from conceptual models built on weak empirical study.

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